

Transnational Monuments

In search for a Universal Sacredness.

This research project aims to question the meaning of a monument as a historical consensus. How can we re-imagine and transform the very idea and concept of the ‘monument’ from an often dangerous and hypocrite celebration of nationalism to an inclusive space and infrastructure for contemplation. Following a microhistorical approach to ask large questions in small places my focus has landed on the Bulgarian/Turkish borderland, which is a connecting membrane between Europe and Asia and between Christianity and Islam. With its cross-country shared identity, communal history, multicultural communities, and mixed loyalties, this borderland is the ideal case-study to investigate monuments as potential transnational and unifying symbols.

People only know where one country ends and another
begins because people have said it is so.

The land doesn’t know. The land probably doesn’t care...

Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, *Promised Lands*

While investigating and travelling the Turkish-Bulgarian borderland for something that is traditional, monumental but not (directly) religious or political, I noticed the frequent appearance of Drinking Water Fountains. These “Çesme” (Turkish) or “Cheshma” (Bulgarian) can be found on either side of the border in equal density—always negotiating a careful relationship with the surrounding landscape. They are scattered in the fields, hidden in the forests, placed as centerpieces on village squares and can be found as sanctuaries of peace next to the roads. It’s a communal and sacred tradition that stems from centuries ago as in multiple cultures, religions and societies, the Cheshma—and the culture of running water—represents the birth of life in both a symbolic and functional way. As public architectural works they do not impose (political) power from above, but rather concentrates collective power from those who surround them. As such, they do not only offer a public service for humans and non-humans but also provide a neutral infrastructure for contemplation, gathering and ritual and are therefore important symbols of cultural memory.

This is a project about water and water infrastructure because the answer to a new understanding of monuments is to be found in the landscape, the mountains, the sky, the stars and the cosmos. Water, as in rain, rivers and lakes ignores the borders we have invented, providing a source of life wherever it flows. The Koran states the following: “We made from Water every living thing” (Qur’an, Surat Al-Anbya’: 21:30) and “да върви по вода” (good luck will flow your way) is a Bulgarian saying from folklore that can be traced back to the ancient Thracians whom inhabited these lands. Their megalithic monuments—still present in the landscape—are directed towards the sky and were highly dependent on water to perform cosmological rituals. Surprisingly similar in shape, atmosphere, materiality and use of landscape, the “Cheshma” is not only a contemporary transnational Bulgarian—Turkish phenomenon but can be considered one of the most functional, inclusive and international monuments of our time.

The future artwork(s) that will grow from this investigation will go beyond the already polarized and infiltrated discussion about problematic historical monuments and investigates what a future monument could be.

A project by *Cédric Van Parys / Office CCXD*
as Artist in Residence at the +359 Gallery in Sofia, Bulgaria.

The Edge of Europe — a hard border



The new border

Preventing immigrants from entering the European Union
However, nature is taking over.



The old border / Iron curtain
Prevented people from leaving the Soviet Union
However, nature is taking over.

Juxtaposition Megalith I Cheshma



Top: Beglik Tash

A prehistoric rock sanctuary situated on the southern Black Sea coast of Bulgaria. Artifact show that it was created around the middle of the 2nd millennium BC.

Bottom: Cheshma #90

Location: Forrest road from Çukurpinar to Kapaklı in Turkey.
Year: 2009 (21th Century AD)



Left: Dolmen

Located in the Strandzha mountain, this is one of the first representations of the monumental tomb architecture on the Bulgarian lands. These kinds of tomb constructions were used by the ancient thracians in the period between the 12th and the 6th century BC.

Right: Cheshma #91

Location: On the small forrest road from Çukurpinar to Kapaklı in Turkey.
Year: Built in the 20th Century AD.



Selected Чешма (cheshma) from the borderland



Чешма (cheshma): #61
Location: Along the road from Tatlıpınar to Beyci
Country: Turkey
Year: Unknown



Чешма (cheshma): #77
Location: Islambeyli village
Country: Turkey
Year: 2017



Чешма (cheshma): #19
Location: Visitza village
Country: Bulgaria
Year: 1980



Чешма (cheshma): #51
Location: Along the road from Kırklarelli to Kofcaz.
Country: Turkey
Year: Unknown



Чешма (cheshma): #92
Location: Along the road from Malko Sharkovo to Woden.
Country: Bulgaria
Year: Unknown



Чешма (cheshma): #18
Location: Tsarevo Village
Country: Bulgaria
Year: Unknown

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TRANSNATIONAL MONUMENTS / +359 Gallery Artist in Residence

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